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any of a large family of chemical elements consisting of scandium (atomic number 21), yttrium (atomic number 39), and 15 elements from lanthanum to lutetium (atomic numbers 57-71). They form a series of 17 chemically similar metals, all but one of which occur in nature. Often they are called simply rare earths, but this is a misnomer because the term earth properly is applied to the oxide...

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